

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

106th Congress
1st Session

Vote No. 84

April 13, 1999, 5:04 p.m.
Page S-3628 Temp. Record

BUDGET RESOLUTION/Instruction on Taxpayer Subsidies & Medicare

SUBJECT: Senate Concurrent Budget Resolution for fiscal years 2000-2009 . . . H.Con. Res. 68. Domenici motion to table the Kennedy motion to instruct conferees.

ACTION: MOTION TO TABLE AGREED TO, 54-45

SYNOPSIS: As passed, H.Con.Res. 68, the Senate Concurrent Budget Resolution for fiscal years 2000-2009: will cut the debt held by the public (money that the Federal Government owes to creditors other than itself) in half over 10 years; will save the entire \$1.8 trillion in Social Security surpluses over the next 10 years for Social Security; will fully fund Medicare, with annual funding doubling over 10 years (all of the President's proposed \$9 billion in Medicare cuts were rejected; as a result, this budget will allow \$20.4 billion more in Medicare spending over the next 10 years than proposed by the President); will provide for \$765.9 billion in net tax relief over the next 10 years (in contrast, the President's budget would increase the tax burden by \$96 billion net over 10 years), and will adhere to the spending restraints (discretionary spending caps and pay-go provisions) of the bipartisan budget agreement as enacted in the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 and the Taxpayer Reform Act of 1997 (the President's proposed budget, in contrast, would dramatically increase spending in violation of that bipartisan agreement, and would result in \$2.2 trillion more in total Federal debt at the end of 10 years than proposed in this Senate budget). After tax relief is provided, the on-budget surplus over 10 years will still be \$101 billion; that money will be available for additional debt reduction or to pay for high priority items, such as the costs of a Medicare reform bill or the costs of emergency spending.

The Kennedy motion to instruct would instruct conferees "to include" provisions that would allow targeted tax relief for "low- and moderate-income working families" and that would reserve a "sufficient" portion of projected non-Social Security surpluses to extend Medicare's solvency "significantly" before any budget surpluses could be used to give tax breaks that mostly benefitted wealthy Americans or before any new, non-offset spending could be approved.

After debate, Senator Domenici moved to table the Kennedy motion. Generally, those favoring the motion to table opposed the motion; those opposing the motion to table favored the motion.

(See other side)

YEAS (54)			NAYS (45)			NOT VOTING (1)	
Republicans (54 or 98%)		Democrats (0 or 0%)	Republicans (1 or 2%)	Democrats (44 or 100%)		Republicans (0)	Democrats (1)
Abraham	Helms		Specter	Akaka	Johnson		Moynihan- ^{3AN}
Allard	Hutchinson			Baucus	Kennedy		
Ashcroft	Hutchison			Bayh	Kerrey		
Bennett	Inhofe			Biden	Kerry		
Bond	Jeffords			Bingaman	Kohl		
Brownback	Kyl			Boxer	Landrieu		
Bunning	Lott			Breaux	Lautenberg		
Burns	Lugar			Bryan	Leahy		
Campbell	Mack			Byrd	Levin		
Chafee	McCain			Cleland	Lieberman		
Cochran	McConnell			Conrad	Lincoln		
Collins	Murkowski			Daschle	Mikulski		
Coverdell	Nickles			Dodd	Murray		
Craig	Roberts			Dorgan	Reed		
Crapo	Roth			Durbin	Reid		
DeWine	Santorum			Edwards	Robb		
Domenici	Sessions			Feingold	Rockefeller		
Enzi	Shelby			Feinstein	Sarbanes		
Fitzgerald	Smith, Bob			Graham	Schumer		
Frist	Smith, Gordon			Harkin	Torricelli		
Gorton	Snowe			Hollings	Wellstone		
Gramm	Stevens			Inouye	Wyden		
Grams	Thomas						
Grassley	Thompson						
Gregg	Thurmond						
Hagel	Voinovich						
Hatch	Warner						

EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:

- 1—Official Business
- 2—Necessarily Absent
- 3—Illness
- 4—Other

SYMBOLS:

- AY—Announced Yea
- AN—Announced Nay
- PY—Paired Yea
- PN—Paired Nay

Those favoring the motion to table contended:

The Kennedy motion would instruct conferees to adopt a partisan, gimmick Medicare proposal that would pretend to fix Medicare by loading it up with Treasury note IOUs. The Senate rejected this same gimmick proposal when it considered the budget resolution, and it will continue to reject it every time it is offered. Many liberal Democratic Senators, and the President, like the idea of filling Social Security and Medicare with Treasury note IOUs, cutting Medicare spending, and then spending all of the Social Security surpluses without giving any tax relief. We do not. That proposal is just a shell game. Social Security surpluses should be saved for Social Security, most of the additional surpluses that will be collected beyond those surpluses and current spending plans should be given back in tax relief instead of spent, and Medicare, which is not generating surpluses and which is in substantial need of structural reforms, should be reformed instead of cut and filled up with IOUs. In rhetoric, liberal Democrats say that their plan to deny tax relief, increase spending, cut Medicare, and raid Social Security will "save" Social Security and Medicare because it will also give both programs more Treasury note IOUs. They know full well that Republicans will never agree to that gimmick plan because it would hurt both programs.

They have just offered this motion for political purposes. They know that Americans would never support them if they admitted that the real reason they are pushing this plan is that it would allow them to spend all of the excess taxes that are going to be collected instead of giving back those excess taxes to the American people. If we were to take the \$800 billion that we have proposed to give in tax relief and put it in the Medicare Trust fund, that money would not stay in the fund--Medicare has enough money to pay current benefits, so the \$800 billion would just be excess that it would be required, by law, to use to buy Treasury notes. Medicare would end up with \$800 billion in Treasury note IOUs, and all of the \$800 billion would end up right back in the general fund of the Treasury. Liberal Democrats would then fall all over themselves trying to come up with new ways to spend that \$800 billion. The only way that they could be stopped would be to pay down the debt held by the public and then to put a limit on that debt so it would be hard for Democrats to borrow the money back to spend. We are going to try hard this year to put in place such a real cap on borrowing. We will see then if Democrats can go beyond their rhetoric and support a real solution to control excessive spending.

Further, even if by some miracle Democrats did not propose spending the money when it ended up back in the general fund, Medicare would not be strengthened by giving it taxpayer handouts. This program has severe structural problems that need to be addressed. Medicare provides services in a costly and inefficient manner, and it provides inadequate coverage. Medicare is supposed to be a self-financing program, and it can be with reforms. We should not just ignore all of the problems and keep the program afloat by giving it massive handouts from the general fund. Medicare should not be a welfare program; it should be a retirement health insurance program.

Democrats know that Republicans will not agree to a gimmick solution for Medicare. They know also that Republicans are ready and willing to sit down and work out a bipartisan solution. They have a choice. They can continue playing political games by offering motions such as the pending Kennedy motion, or they can work on developing a bipartisan reform plan for Medicare. If they follow the former course, they may be able to obfuscate the issue enough to pick up a few more votes for themselves, but Medicare's problems will only get worse. If they choose the latter, we believe that we will be able to fix Medicare this year. After the program is saved, our Democratic colleagues will be free to try to take all the political credit. Our point is that all we are asking is that they put politics aside just long enough for us to get a bipartisan reform bill passed. We believe that saving Medicare is more important than considering political proposals such as the pending Kennedy motion. We of course strongly support the motion to table this motion.

Those opposing the motion to table contended:

In 1964, many Republicans voted against the creation of Medicare, and the program was not enacted. They then heard from their angry constituents. The next year they switched their votes and the program was passed. Medicare was needed because elderly Americans were paying about 19 percent of their income on health care costs. At that time, a prescription drug benefit was not given because 95 percent of private insurance plans did not provide that coverage. Now, 34 years later, health plans often cover prescription drug benefits but Medicare still does not, and elderly Americans who are on Medicare are paying 19 percent of their income on health care costs, largely because they have to pay for their prescription drugs. Currently 39 million Americans are on Medicare, and by 2032, if the program still exists, that number will double. If no reforms are made and no new money is added, the program will be bankrupt in 2015 (the estimate has just been moved up from 2008 due to continuing favorable economic conditions in America). Over the next 10 years, the United States is going to have huge on-budget surpluses. We believe that the best use for those surpluses is to give them to Medicare. Unfortunately, we are afraid that conferees on the budget resolution instead are going to propose using those surpluses to give tax breaks to rich people. We have therefore offered this motion to instruct, which orders conferees to give enough of the surpluses to extend Medicare's solvency significantly before any tax breaks for the wealthy may be considered. We think that this motion reflects the priorities of the American people. We urge our colleagues to support it.